

Frequently Asked Questions

6/3/10

Q: How does the preliminary proposal differ from typical NSF proposals?

A: The preliminary proposals are actually applications to participate in the Ideas Lab. They are very different from standard proposals in that the selection criteria are background, vision, and the ability to contribute to the development of ideas in a team setting. In contrast to “typical” proposals, you are not asked to outline specific projects and experiments.

Q: What kinds of ideas are you looking for in the 2-page preliminary proposals for participating in the Asilomar Ideas Lab?

A: The specific components required in the preliminary proposal are detailed in section V.A. of the program solicitation (see links below). We are not looking for ideas in the preliminary proposal; instead we seek to learn about three main things: 1) your professional background (in broad outline), 2) the expertise you can bring to the challenge, and 3) your ability and willingness to engage with others.

Q: Do I need to include information on collaborations in the preliminary proposal?

A: No. As a matter of fact, we ask that people come to the Asilomar Ideas Lab workshop free of pre-conceptions (including those implied in pre-arranged collaborations). The goal is to explore new thinking and form novel collaborations while at Asilomar. Therefore, identifying collaborators is not a component of the preliminary proposal.

Q: What happens if I am not selected for the Asilomar Ideas Lab—will I still be able to submit a proposal in this competition?

A: Yes. Applicants that are not selected for the Ideas Lab can still submit full proposals by the November 1 deadline. Participation in the Ideas Lab is not required to submit a full proposal. All proposals, whether the outcome of the Ideas Lab or not, will be reviewed by a panel in December.

Q: If the dates of Ideas Lab Workshop (Sept 13-17, 2010) are not convenient for me, so I will not submit a preliminary proposal, will I still be able to submit a proposal in this competition?

A: Yes. If you cannot attend the workshop, you can still submit a full proposal by the November 1 deadline.

Q: What kind of title should I give the preliminary proposal?

A: The title should reflect the expertise and vision you bring to the Ideas Lab.

Q: Will the results of the Ideas Lab be published as a workshop report?

A: No. The ideas generated during the Ideas Lab are turned into proposals that are submitted to NSF for review. Some of them will become funded projects.

Q: If I am not an expert in photosynthesis, do I still have a chance to participate in the Ideas Lab?

A: Yes. One of the purposes of setting up the Ideas Lab is to promote ideas and collaborations that might not occur otherwise. Naturally, an interest in understanding various aspects of photosynthesis is necessary. It is also important that you have an ability to explain the tools and concepts of your field of research to participants having a strong background in photosynthesis. Similarly, it is highly desirable that participants with a background in photosynthesis are inclined to absorb and utilize ideas from other areas such as, but not restricted to, metabolic engineering, synthetic biology, modeling, and systems biology.

Q: Do I have to collaborate with an investigator who comes from UK if I am from the US, or from the US if I am from the UK?

A: The answer to this question has some important yet subtle dimensions. If the proposal you submit on November 1st is developed through participation in the Ideas Lab, overseas collaboration is not a requirement. The quality of the science proposed and its broader impacts are the most important criteria. However, if two proposals are judged to be of equal merit and one brings together a trans-Atlantic team while the other does not, funding preference would be given to the project with US-UK collaboration. If you are a PI from the US and you did not participate in the Ideas Lab, you can submit a proposal with or without a US and/or foreign collaborator(s). Program Directors Mark Brodl or Robert Burnap (photosynthesis@nsf.gov) can help you work with NSF's Office of International Science and Engineering to develop optimal approaches for supporting any international dimensions of your proposed program.

Links to the solicitation:

For the PDF: <http://nsf.gov/pubs/2010/nsf10559/nsf10559.pdf>

For HTML: <http://nsf.gov/pubs/2010/nsf10559/nsf10559.htm>